LIBERTINES? (1 COR. 5-6)

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1. *Introduction*

It is over attitudes to sex that every reader of the Corinthian letters faces a dilemma. In 1 Corinthians 5-6 the opposition appear to be *libertines*; they not only connive at the incest in chapter 5, but seem to justify sexual promiscuity at large with their "Anything is permissible" in 6:12-20. However when we turn to chapter 7 we find them behaving as *ascetics*: they seem not only to abstain from sex themselves but to require the same standard from other people—husbands are not to sleep with their own wives, the unmarried are to stay celibate, married couples are to divorce. This presents the reader with a paradox: Paul's opposition were libertines and ascetics at the same time.

Three avenues of escape seem possible in face of this impasse: the libertine interpretation of chapters 5-6 might be wrong, or the ascetic interpretation of chapter 7; or some reconciliation might be possible. It is the last option which is normally adopted, though in face of the glaring apparent contradiction, in contiguous passages 6:12-20/7:1-11, which is often glossed over rather quickly, and is sometimes ignored.[1] C.K. Barrett, for instance, contents himself by saying, "We know that developed gnosticism in the second century moved sometimes in the direction of asceticism, sometimes in that of libertinism. The disparagement of the material could already have led to the moral indifferentism of 'All things are permitted me'—nothing done in the body really matters, and therefore anything may be done".[2] The same line is taken by W. Schrage: "Eine entscheidende, überall und auch in Korinth

[1] This is especially the case with articles, for example B. Rosner, "Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20", *NovT* 40 (1998) 336-351. But G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) hardly mentions the problem in a discussion of a hundred pages.

[2] C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC; London: Black, 1971) 144-145.

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zugrundeliegende Voraussetzung sowohl des Libertinismus wie auch der Askese, ist ein negatives σῶμα-Verständnis das denn auch gerade in 6,12ff frontal angegriffen und zurückgewiesen wird".[3] Schrage lists a number of Patristic passages in which the followers of Basilides,[4] Carpocrates and other Gnostic groups are said to have acted as they pleased.[5]

Such an apologia sounds persuasive at first hearing. The basic rejection of the physical might show itself in the two forms specified. Those who live in the Spirit should no longer concern themselves with physical pleasures; sex is the primary pleasure of the flesh, and they should rise above it, and live ascetic lives (chapter 7). But equally one may take it that all that matters is the spirit, and the acts of the flesh are irrelevant: in which case "anything is permissible" on the physical level without affecting the spirit (chapters 5-6). However this escape-route raises the suspicion of being too easy, and it is soon seen to be a culde-sac.

Barrett and Schrage suppose that the same group of gnosticising pneumatics lies behind both approaches; and this is supported by the text. At no point does Paul suggest that there is more than one opposition group involved. The people who maintain that "Anything is permissible" at 10:23 base themselves on their γνῶσις (8:1-4), and Paul's final word in 7:40, "I think that I too have the Spirit of God", implies that his opponents make the same claim. But surely the same people cannot simultaneously maintain that sexual acts are immaterial (like drinking "a glass of water", as Lenin put it), and that celibacy is the rule for all?

A modern parallel may help to make the point clear. The charismatic movement is as a whole admirably conservative on sexual morals: not ascetic, but at least intolerant of deviance. However, as often happens with movements of the Spirit, there may be an over-reaching for the spiritual, and such happened in the early 90s in Sheffield, England. An innovative pastor introduced a Nine o'Clock [pm] Service with beat music and strobic lighting, and sex-sessions in the vestry. No

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[3] W. Schrage, *Der Erste Brief an die Korinther* (EKK; Solothurn/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger/Neukirchener Verlag, 1991-) II, 15.

[4] "[Basilides] holds . . . the practice of every kind of lust a matter of perfect indifference", Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I,24.5.

[5] Schrage returns to the topic on pp. 54-56, where he notes that 7:1 represents the opposite pole to the libertinism of the previous verses. He is able to provide better evidence of gnostic ascesis, but his reconciliation of the two poles remains the same, a radical devaluing of the bodily.

doubt some religious front was provided to the girls taking part in the last; but there was a blatant contradiction between the evangelical purity professed by the movement generally and the libertinism being practised. Inevitably the immorality of the latter became known, and a scandal followed, in which the pastor was expelled. One cannot have two obviously contradictory moral standards being practised by the same person: the term for that is hypocrisy. The same must surely have been the case for any gnosticising pneumatics at Corinth: we have only to imagine ourselves expounding the doctrine of the valuelessness of the body to see how difficult we should find it to draw two conclusions, (i) you may do what you please sexually, and also (ii) there is to be no more sexual activity at all.[6]

Of course the reconciliation theory is not tied to the Barrett-Schrage hypothesis of a single opposition. There might be two groups, or two wings of the same group. Thus H.Conzelmann speaks of "discussion between the libertinist and the ascetic persuasions within the community",[7] or R.B. Hays thinks of some church members sleeping with prostitutes while others were ascetics—perhaps the standards expected by the latter were too high for the former and drove them to it.[8] But we have to remember that any "discussion" will have had rather a dogmatic tone to it ("Sex is fleshly and Christians should be spiritual"; "I acted in the name of the Lord Jesus—anything is permissible"); and that those who slept with prostitutes (according to Hays) justified their doing so. But the Sheffield parallel shows the difficulty of the two positions existing side by side in the same community. Furthermore, the form of the correspondence seems to rule out any "discussion" hypothesis. The church has written to Paul asking what he thinks about the ascetic demand to give sex up altogether. If there were two abnormal views of sex on offer, we should have expected their letter to have said, "Some of our leaders say we should give sex up and others say any sexual union is all right: what do you think?" Furthermore Paul himself would surely have exploited the difference. We might have

[6] A similar modern parallel is the David Koresh sect at Waco, Texas, where Koresh did simultaneously require sexual abstinence from others and also enjoy licence himself. But this could only be achieved in a closed community with a single dominant leader; a very different situation from the open and divided community in Corinth.

[7] H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975 = 1st German edition, 1969) 115.

[8] R.B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1997) 115-116, 118.

expected him to say, "How can you condone whoredom and at the same time submit to demands for celibacy?"[9]

The alleged parallels for a libertine gnosticism are also weak. It is easy to find allegations of immorality by orthodox theologians against their Gnostic enemies, but there is no hint of such looseness in the Nag Hammadi documents. K. Rudolph says, "Thus far no libertine writings have appeared even among the plentiful Nag Hammadi texts. The witnesses for the libertine tendency are restricted to the Church Fathers".[10] Rudolph cites considerable evidence for Gnostic ascesis from their own writings,[11] but there is no hint of loose sexual morals. Indeed, such looseness would run counter to the general attitude to sex among Gnostics. Women were suspect, and it was sometimes thought that they would need to become male if they were to be saved (*Gospel of Thomas* 114); but fundamentally sex was the enemy—it led to conception and so to the endless extension of the world of darkness.[12] We need not think that the Fathers were lying over sex scandals in Gnostic groups: most groups include some members who are led into temptation, and the Fathers have just been happy to believe the worst.

The other two possible solutions to the dilemma have found few champions. W. Schmithals thought his gnostics to be straightforward libertines, and that 1 Cor. 7 was misunderstood as ascetic. It was Paul who thought widows should not remarry (7:39), speaking in the Spirit also; so probably the gnostics thought they should. Their letter's query was prompted by Paul's hard line on whoredom: if they should not sleep with a whore, ought this to be extended to all sexual activity?[13] But Schmithals' exposition has found little support, and requires an exegesis of 1 Cor. 7, so I propose to leave it by.

The third possibility, that the pneumatics were just ascetic, has occasionally been defended, but with idiosyncratic arguments. J.H. Bernard

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[9] R.A. Horsley, *I Corinthians* (Abingdon; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998) 94, suggests a slightly different form of the reconciliation theory: Paul was merely warning the church against fornication in 6:12-20—nobody had done it as yet, he just saw it coming. But the discussion includes a series of Corinthian slogans (four according to Horsley) justifying πορνεία, and three times he opens his sentence with the withering "[Or] do you not know?" Rosner, "Temple Prostitution", 337-338, is right to insist that something scandalous has happened.

[10] K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: the Nature and History of an Ancient Religion* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983 = German 1977) 254.

[11] *Gnosis*, 257.

[12] *Gnosis*, 270-272; cf. *Corp.Herm.* I,18, "*eros is the cause of death*", and *Gnosis*, 88-113.

[13] W. Schmithals, *Die Gnose in Korinth* (FRLANT 2.48; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956) 194-201, esp. 198.

took this option in 1907, but supposed that the incestuous man's father was still alive, and was pursuing him through the secular courts (6:1-11).[14] R. Kempthorne took 6:12-20 to be an extension of the argument of 1 Cor. 5, but saw σῶμα as referring throughout to the Body of Christ.[15] More recently W. Deming has proposed a solution similar to Bernard's: the church was divided over the man and his stepmother, and hardliners took the issue to court, and lost; the stepmother was selling her services to the "brother", so indignation was high in the community.[16] I agree with these scholars in thinking that 6:12-20 resumes the topic of sexual misconduct from chapter 5, but should wish to advance this thesis on different grounds. I shall argue that 6:12-20 has been misread. The opposition were ascetics; their policy was that which underlies chapter 7. They condoned the incest of chapter 5, no doubt because the man was an important member of the church. They did not defend whoredom. They were not libertines.

2. *Justifying* πορνεία *(5:1-5)*

> 4:18-5:5 But some of you puffed yourselves up as if I were not coming. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and will get to know not the talk of the puffed up, but their power; for the kingdom of God does not consist of talk but of power. What do you want? Am I to come to you with a cane, or in love and the spirit of meekness? It is actually reported that there is whoredom among you, and such whoredom as does not even occur among pagans, so that a man is living with his father's wife! And are you puffed up? And did you not rather go into mourning, so that he who has done this thing should have been removed from among you? For I, absent in body but present in spirit, have already pronounced judgement as if present on the man who has behaved so in the name of the Lord Jesus: when you and my spirit are gathered together, with the power of our Lord Jesus, [the verdict is] to hand such a man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.

Many commentators draw a line at 4:21: the first four chapters cover the divisions in the Corinthian church and the problem of wisdom; then there is an abrupt move on to the scandals of which Paul has heard orally in chapters 5-6. But Fee[17] and Schrage[18] are right to

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[14] J.H. Bernard, "The Connexion between the Fifth and Sixth Chapters of I Corinthians", *The Expositor* 7 (1907) 433-443.

[15] R. Kempthorne, "Incest and the Body of Christ: A Study of I Corinthians 6.12-7.7", *NTS* 14 (1968) 568-574.

[16] W. Deming, "The Unity of 1 Corinthians 5-6", *JBL* 115 (1992) 289-312. The proposal is properly criticised by Rosner, "Temple Prostitution", 338-340: the reconstruction is fanciful, especially that the stepmother should be paid.

[17] *Corinthians*, 194-195.

[18] *Korinther*, I, 368.

point to elements of continuity in the argument. In particular there are verbal echoes: ἐφυσιώθησαν (4:18), πεφυσιωμένων (4:19), πεφυσιωμένοι (5:2); καυχᾶσαι (4:7), καύχημα (5:6). Paul's threat of the "cane" is a semi-jocular reference to his intending administration of discipline, which he could not do to people prating about wisdom or claiming to be reigning in the kingdom of God, but it certainly could apply to the moral failures of chapters 5-6. Especially significant is the repeated contrast of "word/power". He "will get to know not the word of the puffed up but their power"; the kingdom of God "does not consist of word but of power". The sinner has claimed to act "in the name of the Lord Jesus", but we will have condemned him "with the power of our Lord Jesus", and he will fall ill, and perhaps die.

The syntax of the phrase "in the name of the Lord Jesus" is a long-standing problem. Does it modify κέκρικα, "I have pronounced judgement in the name of the Lord Jesus"? Or συναχθέντων ὑμῶν, "when you are gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus"? Or κατεργασάμενον, "him who has acted so in the name of the Lord Jesus"? Current opinion (Schrage, Hays, Horsley) favours the last as the most natural reading of the order of words, and as suitable for a pneumatic/libertine; though Barrett accepts the older link with συναχθέντων, and Fee that with κέκρικα. But the close similarity of the "name" and the "power" phrases, and their echo of the λόγος/δύναμις contrast in 4:19-20, seem to confirm that Schrage is correct.[19]

For once the situation is clear in outline. No word is spoken of discipline on the woman, so she is not a Christian. Paul is doing his best to maximise the scandal, and he would rub it in further if the father were still alive. It was forbidden under Roman law to marry one's dead father's wife, so it is probable that the man has taken the woman as a concubine.[20] A century before, one Sassia had married her son-in-law at Larinum, so provoking the artificial indignation of Cicero. Paul speaks as if such events were unheard of, but perhaps he had not read *Pro Cluentio*.

English has some problems in rendering πορνεία. We need a word which will have the same root for translating πόρνη, so *immorality* is

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[19] This argument is proposed effectively by J. Murphy-O'Connor in a well-known article, "1 Corinthians, V, 3-5", *RB* 84 (1977) 239-245. It is sometimes suggested that Paul has slightly adapted the man's words: that he actually said, "I am acting in the name of Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12; 12:3), but the Pauline version makes it the more obviously scandalous.

[20] C.S. de Vos, "Stepmothers, Concubines and the Case of Πορνεία in I Corinthians 5", *NTS* 44 (1998) 104-114.

unhelpful (besides lacking colour); as no money is passing hands, *fornication* and *prostitution* are not involved. I have fallen back on *whoredom*, *whore*, which have the advantage of being in use to express an aggressive attitude to sexual deviance, without the necessary suggestion of payment. πορνεία is used in this way in 5:1 (twice), and πόρνος at 5:11; and πόρνη 1is used frequently in an extended and non-commercial sense, the Great Whore, in the Apocalypse.

What makes the case so particularly scandalous is that the church has not merely tolerated it, but justified it: "And are you puffed up?" The transgressor has not merely broken a reiterated law of God (Lev. 18:8; Deut. 23:1; 27:20); he has claimed to be doing so "in the name of the Lord Jesus", and he cannot have been daring to speak such blasphemy without the support of other members of the community, who have just shown themselves to be "puffed up" by other unrealities in 4:8-10. One might have expected them to have done without food and washing and marital relations, "gone into mourning", in prayer that the miscreant "might be removed from among" them, whether by voluntary resignation, or if need be, death. The church's first concern must be the purity of the church.

Paul was later accused of being too weak to apply proper discipline in the church (2 Cor. 10:6; 11:21), but he could hardly be more firm in the present instance, which indeed could scarcely suit him better in his fight with the pneumatics. While they (ὑμεῖς, 5:2) puff themselves up, he (ἐγώ) in Ephesus has "passed judgement" on the man. The scene is reminiscent of the courts of justice in Soviet Russia. Caesar has spoken from the Party office, and the case is finished. Paul is not waiting to hear counter-arguments: his spirit is at the meeting the church is to hold in his absence, and he is taking the chair. He has already declared the verdict. All they have to do is rubber-stamp it and carry it out; and they will have "the power of our Lord Jesus" behind them.

The sentence is "deliverance to Satan". The idea goes back to Job 1:12; 2:6, where God puts Job in the power of Satan, to despoil him of his goods and family, and of his health. Here it is the health only which is to be affected: he is to be handed over "for the destruction of the flesh". Paul makes a similar comment at 11:30-31, where many of those who are weak or ill are suffering the consequences of their abuse of the eucharist, and some have actually died because of this. None of these cases is quite the same. Job was a good man, and he was handed over to Satan to test his goodness. No formal action was taken by the Corinthian church for its members' failure to examine

themselves properly at the communion. Paul clearly has something similar in mind here, though now there is to be some liturgical action to expel the man from the community of grace. What is expected is that he will fall ill (εἰς ὄλεθρον τῆς σαρκός), or conceivably actually die; but the kindly pastor knows that this will be for his eternal good, "that the spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord". We may contrast this with 1 Tim. 1:20, where, in imitation, Hymenaeus and Alexander have been "handed over to Satan" that they may be taught not to blaspheme. The "teaching" here is punishment (παιδευθῶσιν), and there is no evident concern for their ultimate salvation.

Paul has now (in principle) settled the man's hash, and turns his mind to the more important issue of the church's purity: such sin is like leaven, and if tolerated will corrupt the whole lump. The man must be expelled. Paul has scriptural authority for this: Deut. 23:1 forbad a man's taking "his father's wife", and in the next chapter Deut. 24:7 (cf. 22:24) the community is bidden to "purge the evil from among you (5:13). Paul had in fact dealt with the issue of those who went whoring in his Previous Letter, and had required the same discipline of shunning (5:9). The citation of Deut. 24:7 recapitulates the deliverance to Satan at 5:5, and the command to purge out the old leaven in 5:7, and it brings the issue of practical action to an effective close.

6:1-11 brings in a new issue, the pursuit of legal claims before non-Christian courts. 5:12-13, still on the first scandal, says, "For what concern is it of mine to judge those outside [the Church]? Do you not judge those within? God will judge those outside." This then leads naturally on to the allied topic of going to law before unbelievers. There is no indication that this action is being justified by any "knowledge". It is just convenient to Paul to have a series of scandals with which to reproach the church, and to lampoon their puffed up claims to being spiritual. By 6:9, however, his mind is wandering back to the sexual issue: "Do not be deceived—neither whorers nor idolaters nor adulterers nor sodomites nor homosexuals . . ." He can lay it on thick, implying that the whole gamut of iniquity is either practised in the Corinthian church or soon may be; and it is sexual sins which head the list, as πόρνος did at 5:11.

3. *Justifying* πορνεία *(6:12-20)*

The problem is 6:12-20, which is generally agreed to be difficult to follow. It is clear that Paul is citing catch-phrases used by his opponents, and then capping them; and there are some persuasive suggestions of

how to see which is which. But the subject of the paragraph is not made plain, and is generally misunderstood. We may accept the following punctuation of 6:12-17:

> "Anything is lawful for me"—but not everything is beneficial. "Anything is lawful for me"—but I will not be dominated by anything. "Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food; and God will bring both to nothing"—the body is not for whoredom but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body: and God both raised the Lord and will raise us up through his Spirit. Do you not know that your bodies are limbs of Christ? Am I then to take the limbs of Christ and make them limbs of a whore? Never! Do you not know that the man who is united with the whore is one body [with her]? For it says, The two shall become one flesh. But he who is united with the Lord is one Spirit [with him].

The tag cited twice in 6:12 comes again at 10:23, where it is part of the knowledge enabling one to eat idol-meat: but here the context is about whoredom (6:13c, 18), a whore (6:15b), the whore (6:16a). This has led to the widespread conclusion that the opponents' knowledge justified the use of prostitutes on the basis that "Anything is lawful", and that they were therefore *libertines*. Of course this fitted well with earlier commentaries' descriptions of Corinth as a sink of sexual vice (κορινθιάζεσθαι), with sailors and a temple of Aphrodite, and Strabo's thousand cult-prostitutes. But this colourful picture is hard to credit.

(i) When Paul has a scandal on his hands, he makes the issue plain in order to shame those responsible:

> It has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you . . . Each of you says, I belong to Paul . . . (1:11-12);
> Already you are sated! Already you have become rich! Already, without us, you have begun to reign! (4:8);
> It is actually reported that there is whoredom among you (5:1);
> When any of you has a case against another, how dare you take it to court before the unrighteous? (6:1);
> So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed (8:11);
> Any woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered disgraces her head (11:5);
> When you come together it is not [really] to eat the Lord's Supper . . . each goes ahead with his own supper, and one goes hungry, and another becomes drunk (11:20-21);
> How can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? (15:12).

The first thing to strike us reading 6:12-20 is the absence of any clear context. We might have expected something like: "I am astonished that some among you are uniting yourselves with whores, and are also claiming to do this in the name of the Lord. For it is said, 'Anything is lawful'". Surely if Paul heard that his converts were whoring he

would hit the roof, as he does at 2 Cor. 12:21, and the first reaction of indignation would be to specify the scandal. What he in fact does is to respond seriously to what must seem blasphemies if the context is prostitution.

(ii) When Paul is faced with a scandal, he does what he can to discipline the sinner; and if he cannot, he threatens supernatural sanctions. When the opposition have been puffed up over their leadership, and have had pretensions to reigning in the kingdom of God, Paul promises to come, perhaps with a cane, and find out their power (4:18-21). The man with his father's wife is to be delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (5:3-5), and in the meantime is to be shunned (5:11). The litigants in secular courts will not inherit the kingdom (6:9-10). Those who dine in an idol temple sin against Christ (8:12), and may die like the idolaters in the wilderness (10:6-11). He threatens the bare-headed woman who prays and prophesies with having her hair shorn (11:6); and those who defile the eucharist with greed and drunkenness may expect sickness and death, if not divine judgement (11:27-32).

Action against the sexual transgressor was Paul's first disciplinary measure: he had written in the Previous Letter that anyone found whoring should be shunned—not of course anyone at all, but only any Christian man (5:9); and now the same discipline (5:13) is to be applied to the man with his father's wife (described as a πόρνος), the secular litigant (πλεονέκτης, ἅρπαξ), any idolater (cf. chapter 8), reviler (λοίδορος, cf. 4:12, λοιδορούμενοι) or drunk person (μέθυσος, cf. 11:21, μεθύει). Paul means it with the πόρνος, but wants just to sound menacing over the rest: he cannot have half the church shunning the other half.

It is the same in the Second Epistle. In 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 Paul demands that the faithful stop their yoking with alien faithless Christians who are unrighteous (ἀνομία) and idolatrous (εἰδώλων); they are to come out from among them and purge themselves from all defilement.[21] In 12:20-21 Paul promises to come and discipline those who have quarrelled, and also "many of those who sinned before and have not repented of their uncleanness and whoredom and licentiousness". Whoring had been a problem from the beginning of the Corinthian church, and would extend beyond the confines of our four Letters.[22]

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[21] M.D. Goulder, "2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 as an Integral Part of 2 Corinthians", *NovT* 36 (1994) 47-57.

[22] The πορνεία reproved in the Previous Letter, and that threatened in 2 Cor. 12:21 are distinct from the case in 1 Cor. 6:12-21, in that there is no suggestion that anyone

The amazing thing is that there is no mention of any discipline in 1 Cor. 6:12-20. The absence of any hint of apostolic punishment raises problems for the libertine interpretation.

(iii) Much has been written in recent years on Paul's rhetoric; but one repeated rhetorical strategy we certainly do find is the ABA' pattern. He opens the letter with the church's divisions (1:10-17), but moves on to the substantive issue underlying them in 1:17b-2:16; only to return to relations between himself, Apollos and "another" in 3:1-4:7. The idol-meat issue is discussed in chapters 8-10 with an excursus on giving up one's rights in chapter 9; and other instances will spring to mind. Now the opening of 6:12-21 suggests that we have the same structure in chapters 5-6. The practical issues raised by the incest have been dealt with in chapter 5: the man is to be expelled and shunned, and the church purged of corruption. But the underlying issue has not yet been dealt with: the man claimed to be "acting in the name of the Lord Jesus", and this cannot be allowed to pass without comment. So Paul returns to the battle at 6:12.

The man maintained that he was "acting in the name of the Lord Jesus" because under the new dispensation "anything was permissible". The opposition's slogan provides the specific justification for what anyone else would have thought impermissible. The lack of any linking particle shows that 6:12 does not follow on from 6:11: in the same way 4:1, οὕτως ἡμᾶς λογιζέσθω ἄνθρωπος . . ., lacks a connecting particle, and resumes the topic of the pneumatics' attitude to Paul from 3:21a, "So let no one boast of men". But with or without a particle Paul is liable to return to an earlier thesis without warning, as he does at 10:1. He cites the tag twice, only to rebut it twice. Even if things are permissible, that does not mean they are profitable. Even if things are permissible, I do not want to get myself into the power of anyone/anything. ἐξουσιασθήσομαι is a kind of play on ἔξεστιν. τινος might mean "anything" (out of the πάντα), but the ὑπό makes "anyone" also likely: the man has put himself in the power of his concubine, as will be argued in 6:16.

It appears that the tag of 6:12 did not originally have anything to

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justified them. It is clear that the incest had come as news to Paul (5:1), and was unconnected with the cases in the Previous Letter. Those who "sinned before" and had defied Paul at his second visit (2 Cor. 13:2; 12:21) are accused of sexual faults, but the arrogance (φυσιώσεις). etc., seem to be a different issue in 12:20. Fornication was just very widespread in ancient cities (1 Thess. 4:3-7; 1 Cor. 7:2).

do with sexual relations. In 10:23 it is cited again in the generalised form πάντα ἔξεστιν, and in the context of idol-meat: anything is permissible for the knowledgeable because idol-gods do not exist. 6:13 gives the same context: "Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will bring both to nothing". The πάντα ἔξεστιν tag belonged in the discussion about idol-meat, and it was a (rather reasonable) inference from the (entirely reasonable) premiss that there is only one God (8:1-6). The incestuous man has applied this apparently universal tag to his own situation, adding μοι: "Anything is permissible for me". It sounds accordingly as if it applied to all ethical questions, including πορνεία (or stealing or murder), which it was never intended to do. Paul cites the basis for it in the idol-meat discussion at 6:14, and so shows that it has been torn out of context and exploited for the man's advantage.

Paul continues his rebuttal with some effective ripostes. "Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food" is answered by "But the body is not for whoredom but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body". He agreed with the opposition about the one God (8:6), and, with strict reservations, thought one could eat meat (in private, if unobserved, if not told it had been sacrificed) without coming to any harm (10:25-30). He even extended the principle to meat at church suppers (Gal. 2:11-14). But what may be allowed in eating cannot by any means be applied to sex. There it is not the stomach which is involved but the body.[23] Sex involves a special dimension (6:15-19). The Christian has consecrated his body to Christ, and any relation of whoredom is unthinkable. He adds "and the Lord for the body" as a rhetorical flourish. πορνεία here bridges the specific to the general: the man's relation with his concubine was whoredom (5:1 *bis*), but the principle applies to sexual laxity at large.

The opposition were pneumatics for whom the flesh was on a lower level than the spirit. They were already πνευματικοί, enriched, reigning, glorified. To them food and the stomach into which it goes are on the fleshly level, which "God will bring to nothing"; what matters is the spirit, and it is this which will survive death. But this will not

[23] A long tradition understands Paul's use of σῶμα to represent not just the physical but the whole person: so R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1951) I, 194-195; J.A.T. Robinson, *The Body* (SBT 1.5; London: SCM, 1952). This has been strongly disputed however by R.H. Gundry, *SOMA in Biblical Theology* (SNTS MS; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

do for Paul, who responds: "and God both raised the Lord Jesus and will raise us up by his power". On the contrary: Jesus was raised *physically* (chapter 15), and we will be raised physically too, with a transformed *body*. So God has already shown his deep concern for the body, our physical as well as our spiritual being, and what we have done with our bodies will be important (2 Cor. 5:10), above all what we have done sexually.

The special position of sexual acts is set out in the following verses: Paul regards it as self-evident, and underscores this with a triple "[Or] do you not know?" (6:15,16,19). "Your bodies are members of Christ: am I then to take the members of Christ and make them members of a whore?" Again πόρνη serves a double purpose. It is both an abusive term for the concubine in the case under discussion (like πορνεία in 5:1 or πόρνος in 5:11), and also a general term for sexual misconduct, an ever-present temptation in the tolerant ancient city-culture (5:9; 2 Cor. 12:21). The presence of the incest case in Paul's mind is clear from the article in 6:16,"Do you not know that he who unites himself to the whore (τῇ πόρνῃ) is one body?" Which whore? Paul means the concubine, and ὁ κολλώμενος means the man who "has" her.

Underlying the argument is Gen. 2:24, "The two shall become one flesh". The words were intended to refer to marital union, but Paul takes them to cover all sexual union, and to see sex as forming a permanent metaphysical unity: copulation creates an indissoluble new combined σῶμα, a single σάρξ, into which it is unthinkable (μὴ γένοιτο) that the members of Christ could be fused. On the contrary, "he who unites himself to the Lord is one spirit": Paul could have said "one body" (12:12-27), but he wants as strong a contrast as possible with the fleshly union under discussion. He has slightly amended the LXX προσκολληθήσεται to κολλώμενος, so retaining the notion of *joining* without the sexual limitation.[24]

Characteristically, Paul now closes the topic by making it more general and by lifting the eyes to a higher, divine level. "Flee whoredom" of all kinds, he says, just as he will say "Flee from idolatry" (10:14)—whoredom and idolatry, the two great perils for a Gentile Christian. "Every [other] sin which a man does is outside the body but the man who goes whoring is sinning against his own body". Paul would not

[24] N. Fisk, "ΠΟΡΝΕΥΕΙΝ as Body Violation: The Unique Nature of Sexual Sin in 1 Corinthian 6.18", *NTS* 42 (1996) 540-558, agrees in taking the verse as Pauline, not a slogan of the opposition. His exegesis is close to mine.

think that gluttony or drunkenness or suicide were exceptions to this: people take in excessive food or alcohol, or slit their wrists, from ἐκτὸς τοῦ σώματος. There may be many sins of *thought* (διαλογισμοὶ πονηροί, Matt. 15:19), but the only sin which a man can *do* (ποιήσῃ) from within the body is πορνεία: for, as Gen. 2:24 makes clear, the sexual sinner unites himself for eternity in one flesh with the whore. Nor need you think that it is just the woman who is debauched (ποιεῖ αὐτὴν μοιχευθῆναι, Matt. 5:32); the whorer "is sinning against his own body", which can never break free from her. He has put himself in her power (6:12; 7:4).

A good menacing warning is a fine note to end the discussion, but Paul can rise above that, and appeal to the aspiration which has in the long run given his Christianity the victory. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which you have from God?" Indeed we did know that: we had something like that (of the whole Church, actually) in 3:16, and it is a thought which will serve more powerfully than any threat to keep the young believer from the brothel. "You are not your own, for you were bought for a price". Slave and slave-owner alike, we have all been bought into God's household at the price of the cross. The man of God who can produce such a theology needs no more to persuade us to "glorify God in our bodies".

The text leaves us then with a plausible scenario. Paul's opponents are people of high principle, *ascetics*, who have given up sex altogether as a practice of the flesh, and who are pressing others to abstain from marital relations, to remain celibate if unmarried and to divorce if not (7:1-11). They are *Jewish Christians* working on the basis that there is one God (8:4), and risking the salvation of their Gentile brethren who have been until recently accustomed to idol-worship (8:7); so their sexual asceticism is a deviation from normal Judaism, and may be related to visionary techniques (2:9; 13:12; 2 Cor. 12:1-5).[25] This deviation is however a mild one compared with their attitude to idol-meat, which is justified by a logical inference from classical Jewish monotheism (8:1-4). No doubt this surprising development is a consequence of the group's membership. It includes wealthy or influential people whose social and commercial position depends on attending dinners, some of them held in pagan temples (8:10).

It is likely that the incestuous man in chapter 5 is in the same category: it is easy to exercise discipline when a church member is socially

[25] M.D. Goulder, "Vision and Knowledge", *JSNT* 56 (1994) 53-71.

weak, and it is easy to overlook the peccadillos of those who contribute generously to church funds, or open their homes for church meetings. Nor need the case have seemed so scandalous as Paul makes it out. In the first century men often died in their forties, women in their thirties.[26] Perhaps the now dead father had taken a second wife in her teens a few years before he died. Often such young widows could not return to their former home, and might stay on. Coeval with the heir and still in the bloom of youth, she might well attract his affection, as Abishag attracted Adonijah's; and what went on at night might be veiled from prurient speculation. With time the concubinage became known and winked at; and when criticism was finally voiced, he could appeal to the principle "Anything is permissible", now established for the idol-meat question. He had been acting "in the name of the Lord Jesus", and could say defiantly, "Anything is permissible for me".

Such brazenness would place his ascetic friends in a severe dilemma, and we cannot tell how they responded. Two possible policies are suggested by later church practice. One might be: "It is a passing infatuation; he'll get over it in a month or two if we leave him alone. Hush it up so far as we can". Or another could be, "The Torah says . . . לא יקח, and that means *He shall not marry*: the words do not apply to concubines". The casuistic skills of Catholic exegetes have found many an inconvenient marriage to be annullable. Often an heir may have slept with his father's slave-girls without a thought, and the concubinage is only scandalous when Paul's theology makes it so. So we may accuse his pneumatic opponents of respecting persons and of inconsistency, procrastination and dishonesty; but not of *gnostisierender Libertinismus*.

[26] W. Deming, "Unity", 294, n. 16, gives a good list of references for ancient lifespans between the sexes, and for consequent differentiated ages of marriage.